

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

RECOLLECTIONS OF STEFFENS.

GERMAN UNIVERSITY LIFE. THE STORY OF MY CAREER AS STUDENT AND PROFESSOR. BY HEINRICH STEFFENS. Translated by WILLIAM L. GAGE. 12mo. \$2.50. J. B. Lippincott & Co.

The title of this work is somewhat misleading, as it relates less to the university life of Germany, than to some incidents in the career of one of her distinguished professors. Steffens, however, never occupied the highest rank among the learned men of his adopted country. He was an original, rather than a sound thinker, addicted to bold, and apparently fanciful speculations, with a deep vein of mysticism pervading his nature, but a man of great activity of mind, of an intense thirst for knowledge, and of a certain naive simplicity and sturdy rectitude of character. During his protracted life he was led into intimate contact with many of the most celebrated representatives of German literature and philosophy, of whom his reminiscences form the most attractive portions of the present volume.

Steffens was a native of Norway, in which country he was born May 2, 1773. His parents removed to Copenhagen while he was yet a child, and on growing up he became a member of the Universities of Copenhagen and of Kiel, and was a licensed lecturer in the latter before he had completed his twenty-fifth year. He early evinced a passion for the philosophy of religion, being at first mainly under the influence of Spinoza, but afterward a disciple successively of Kant, Jacobi, and Schelling, adhering in the end to the system of the latter. At the same time he cherished a deep interest in many branches of natural science, and together with Ritter was instrumental in giving the first consistent form and development to the principles of physical geography.

At the age of thirty, or soon after, Steffens took up his temporary abode at Jena, in order to gratify the eager desire which he had long felt of meeting the professors of that famous University on their own ground. A. W. Schlegel and Schelling were at that time the principal objects of his curiosity, and his first impressions of the latter rendered German are thus described:

"A. Schlegel had now come to Jena with his highly-gifted wife, and also Schelling, who was to deliver a triadic lecture in the great hall of the University. He had just come from Leipzig, and was recovering from severe illness. Professors and students were all astir, and I, too, was in a fever of impatience to get to his chair. He had a youthful countenance; he was two years younger than I, and now the first of the men of eminence whose acquaintance I was eager to make. He had an air of ease, I might say of indifference, and a decided, bold, commanding air, the broad face, the countenance expressive of energy, the nose a little inclined upward, and in his large, clear eyes lay a mighty power. When he began to speak he seemed constrained only a few moments, but then absorbed his whole soul. He spoke of the idea of a philosophy of nature, of the need of embracing nature in her unity, of the light which she sheds on all things, and so on. What I heard should bind their speculations at the stand-point of the unity of nature. He carried me completely away, and the following day I hastened to visit him. Galvanism was then attracting the attention of naturalists; it was a great discovery, and I, too, tried to understand it. But a high mystery was then coming under study. It, too, was deeply interested in it. Schelling received me not merely in a friendly, but in a most hearty way, the first time I saw him. We talked over his views without hurrying and without reservation. Among men of my walk we had found only antagonists, and such, too, as were ready to comprehend him.

His conversation was charming. I was familiar with his writings, I coincided almost entirely with his views, and I anticipated from him and his efforts great changes in all natural science. I could not prolong my visit, but I left him with his best regards. In truth, the last moment in which I saw him was the most delightful of my life. I have often thought of him since, and his views without hurrying and without reservation. Among men of my walk we had found only antagonists, and such, too, as were ready to comprehend him.

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"Gentlemen," said he, "withdraw within yourselves; enter into your own mind; we are now not dealing with anything outward—purely with ourselves."

The hearers, that is to say, I and my friends, were silent. Some changed their position and straightened themselves up; others bowed themselves over and closed their eyes. All waited with great eagerness to see what would come next. "Gentlemen," continued he, "you have just now withdrawn from the hearers set their minds most intently upon the wall, and everything seemed favorable thus far. 'Have you thought—the wall?' asked Fichte. "Now, gentlemen, let your thoughts be free. I am about to tell you what I have to say, to see what confusion and perplexity now seem to arise. Many of the hearers seemed no ways able to discover that that had thought the wall, and I now understand how it might well happen that young men, who have been taught speculative philosophy in so clumsy a way, might, in later efforts, fall into errors which should be grave, not to say dangerous. Fichte's lecture was exceedingly distinct and clear. I was wholly absorbed in his subject, and had to confess that I had never listened to such a speaker before."

Upon his first attempt to make the acquaintance of Goethe, the self-love of Steffens received a severe shock. He had been invited by a certain family to meet Goethe at their house, but the great poet, it seems, for some reason or other, took no notice of the young enthusiast. The thought of the interview formed an "epoch in his life." As he was walking to the house, it seemed as if some great catastrophe was about to happen.

Goethe appeared. It is known to every one who has seen him, how his noble figure, his admirable carriage, and his speaking eye, the very eye of which appeared to him with whom he had never even spoken, were overwhelmingly imposing on all who met him for the first time. The greatness revealed in his works was fully expressed in the man himself. When I saw him I was struck with admiration, and I was deeply moved.

It seemed as if I were looking upon a God.

The impression that Goethe must have had a suspicion of what he had been to me was natural; but he entertained himself the whole evening with Mr. Stickelberg. It was not my good fortune to draw his attention for a single moment to the fact that he had done him a wrong.

The next morning he sent me a letter, in which he said: "I am sorry to say that I am not able to do you any service, and I hope you will forgive me for not having done so."

"I don't care what he says," I said to myself.

His pride was so deeply offended that for some time he resisted all overtures toward a second meeting. But his scruples were at length overcome, and on being accidentally thrown into company with the poet, he accepted an invitation to make him a visit at Weimar, where he stayed a number of days as his guest.

Goethe was communicative in the highest degree, and this necessity, because it was the object to gain over him, induced him to talk freely with me. He was exposed to uninterrupted conversation on scientific subjects. I became acquainted with Goethe on a side of his character hitherto unknown to me. His deep sympathy with nature, that quietness, and peaceful power which appeared in his countenance and in the eyes of light, words, became apparent; plants and animals, and even the flashing colors of the rainbow, he could view, not in their isolated unity, but in all their mutual dependence and connection. His countenance, his countenance, his life, and studied my character, will

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